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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AM](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: MOSCOW'S REACTION TO POLITICAL UNREST IN ARMENIA

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary. The MFA issued a statement on March 3, expressing regret for the unrest in Armenia and support for Kocharian's efforts to reach a peaceful settlement. MFA officials characterized the February 19 presidential elections as free and fair, and told us that although Russia would continue to monitor closely the situation, it would not interfere. The MFA acknowledged that several local newspapers gave front-page coverage to the latest escalation of violence in Armenia -- competing with the coverage of Dmitriy Medvedev's electoral victory -- but dismissed the media's concern of a possible color revolution. MFA officials also told us that they were confident Sarkisian would continue Kocharian's pro-Russia foreign policy, although Russian analysts were more skeptical. The MFA and experts noted that a significant irritant in the Russia-Armenia bilateral relationship was the xenophobic attacks against Armenians in Russia. End summary.

MFA Comments on Unrest

¶2. (C) The MFA issued a statement on March 3, expressing regret at the worsened situation and advising a peaceful dialogue among all the parties involved in the interest of the citizens' safety and the stable development of the country. MFA Fourth CIS Department Deputy Director Igor Gromiyko told us March 3 that the GOR continued to believe that there was no serious problem with the February 19 voting and supported Sarkisian's victory. Expressing regret over the violence that erupted over the weekend, Gromiyko said that the GOR would follow the events there closely but would not interfere. He scoffed at the many front-page articles in leading local newspapers alluding to another color revolution. The tents in the center square were "reminiscent" of Ukraine's Orange Revolution but "the same scenario does not apply to this case," he added.

¶3. (C) MFA Armenia Desk Head Sergey Vinogradov told us in a separate meeting that the opposition led by presidential candidate Ter-Petrossian had no ground for protest. The GOR sent over 160 election observers, of whom 23 were with the ODHIR, and was "satisfied" with election procedures. Vinogradov, who participated in the ODHIR short-term election monitoring team, was "surprised" with opposition demonstrations. He personally visited 16 polling stations across Armenia and maintained that he could vouch for no large-scale falsifications which the opposition reported. Vinogradov told us that Ter-Petrossian visited Moscow three days before the election, but considering it a private visit, neither the MFA nor the Armenian embassy was involved with his Moscow schedule. Andranik Migranyan, a Kremlin-connected commentator and prominent member of the ethnic Armenian community in Russia, told us March 3 that he was not surprised by but disappointed with Ter-Petrossian's behavior.

According to him, Ter-Petrosian went for broke because it was his last chance to come to power. Migranyan predicted that with little support for Ter-Petrosian among the elite and the parliament, there was no schism among most of those in power and the situation would stabilize with time

Continue the Kocharian Path?

14. (C) Vinogradov emphasized that Kocharian's "pro-Russian outlook," combined with frequent consultations with Putin, ensured good bilateral relations, with Russia hoping Kocharian's "hand-picked" successor Sarkisian would continue the same path. Vinogradov noted that the bilateral relationship was growing steadily. Despite the lack of direct transportation routes between the two countries, the bilateral trade reached USD 700 million last year, while Russia remains the biggest investor in Armenia which reached USD 1 billion in 2007. However, Fedor Lukyanov Editor-in-Chief of Russia in Global Affairs downplayed Vinogradov's enthusiasm for Sarkisian, arguing that with no other choice at hand, Russia was accepting Sarkisian reluctantly as Kocharian's successor; unlike his "mentor," Sarkisian was more likely seek a geopolitical balance among many powers and less pro-Russian.

Irritant: Russia's Xenophobia

15. (C) All interlocutors, including MFA officials, told us that the single largest irritant in the relationship is the growing number of incidents of xenophobia in Russia. Ruben Ananyan, Senior Advisor at the Armenian Embassy, told us that the Russian leadership's repeated words -- Armenia is Russia's important strategic partner -- loses its convincing power if Armenians are regularly murdered, attacked and harassed on the streets of Russia.

Comment

16. (C) The GOR, confident that the situation will normalize within 20 days, expects the status quo in the bilateral relationship.
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